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SIPDIS

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AMEMBASSY LONDON PASS TO MOD, FCO

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SUBJECT: Basrah Media Reporting Trip - "Tell them that our door is open for business."

1. (U) Summary. On May 18-21 PA Abu Dhabi conducted a media-reporting trip for Abu Dhabi TV, Arabic Language daily Al-Ittihad and monthly Gulf Defense Magazine to Basrah, Iraq to highlight Basrah political and economic stability and UK/Iraqi joint military training activities. The group met with and interviewed the Governor of Basrah, Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Basrah City Council, members of the Basrah Chamber of Commerce and the British Consul General. The group also traveled to Umm Qasr, participated in a joint UK/Iraqi naval training exercise and interviewed the commander of Iraqi naval forces in Umm Qasr. USAID hosted a representational event for the group with local Iraqi journalists, USAID staff and local development professionals. The journalists were accompanied by the APAO and Information Specialist from the Public Affairs Office in Abu Dhabi. During the trip, PA Abu Dhabi worked with program partners in Basrah and Bahrain to plan future media reporting trips for UAE and regional Arab media. PA Abu Dhabi is currently planning a follow on trip for Al-Arabiya June 19-22. End Summary.

Immediate Results

2. (U) Abu Dhabi TV produced 2 news pieces based on the reporting trip, the first of which aired May 22 and the second of which aired May 24. Post anticipates that Al-Ittihad will publish 2-3 print media pieces and that Gulf Defense Magazine will have a feature length article in its next publication. The Abu Dhabi TV May 22 story is available at the link below:

[http://intranet.abudhabi.state.gov/PAO/Media% 20Resources/Abu%20Dhabi%20TV%20-%20Umm%20Qasr%20-%20052305.mpg](http://intranet.abudhabi.state.gov/PAO/Media%20Resources/Abu%20Dhabi%20TV%20-%20Umm%20Qasr%20-%20052305.mpg)

The Logistical Pipeline into Basrah for Arab Media

3. (U) The program was developed and implemented as a six-way partnership between the Public Affairs Office in Abu Dhabi, the Public Affairs Office for Navy Central Command in Bahrain, the British Forces Media Operations Group of the Multi-National Division Southeast (MND SE/UK) at the Basrah airport, the British Consulate, the Regional Embassy Office in Basrah, and USAID in Basrah. For the May 18-21 program, PA Abu Dhabi recruited the participating media and escorted them on the trip. PAO NAVCENT provided the air transportation from Dubai to Bahrain and served as overall coordination point for the program. The Media Ops group with MND SE/UK provided accommodations, arranged for the air transport from Bahrain to Basrah and arranged the May 20 program to Umm Qasr (including force protection and transport). The British Consulate arranged the May 19 program in Basrah (including force protection and transport). REO Basrah and USAID hosted the May 20 representational event at the USAID facility at the Basrah Airport.

Journalists Interview Basrah Government and Business Leaders

4. (U) On May 19, media and political officer for the British Consulate Karen McLuskie programmed the journalists for a full day of meetings with leading Basrah government and business leaders. They were the first non-Iraqi Arab media to interview each of these individuals. The group first met with Mrs. Isra' Al-Sa'ad, the Deputy City Council Chairman for Basrah, a Shia woman who had recently won re-election based on her record of creditability. She provided the group with a tour of the new city council facilities and discussed reconstruction and economic development issues. The group then met with Mr. Mohammed Sa'doun Al-Ebadi, the Chairman of the City Council, who highlighted the high level of security in Basrah. He criticized western and Arab media outlets for grouping Basrah with other regions in Iraq when highlighting security concerns in the country. He indicated that these false concerns were keeping media organizations from coming to Basrah and focusing on its many accomplishments. The group then met with Mr. Mohammed Al-Wai'li, the Governor of Basrah, who stated that Basrah now has 13,000 police officers, most of them trained by the British and Czech Police. He said that the city government is continuing to work with coalition partners in developing basic infrastructure and that great progress had been made since the end of the war, but that the lack of funds from donor nations was limiting their work. He is currently focusing on increasing foreign direct investment into Basrah and opening greater trade links between Basrah and other countries in the region. When asked what message he wanted the group to take back to the

outside world he said, "Tell them that our door is open for business."

15. (U) The group interviewed members of the Basrah Chamber of Commerce, including Mr. Dhafer Abdul-Majeed, Director, and Mr. Aziz Al-Ramadhan, Deputy Director of the Chamber, as well as Mr. Zuhair Kubba, a prominent local businessmen in Basrah. The director stated that the economy during Saddam's regime had not focused on investment and trade with other countries. He said that the impact of the new free market economy is changing the way that Iraqis think about their role in society. In the past, Iraqis in were just told what to do. Now they must take initiative, which is creating opportunities for those motivated and capable, and challenges for those who are not.

16. (U) During the discussion, local businessman Mr. Zuhair Kubba painted a very bright economic picture of Basrah, highlighting the safety and security of the Basrah region as a selling point for potential investors. He indicated that UAE investors are very active in southern Iraq. He said that investors in Abu Dhabi and Dubai were planning on building a seaport in Al-Fao, modeled after Jebel Ali and that investment in Basrah-based banks from other Gulf-region countries had tripled in the last two years.

17. (U) The group finished the day with interviews with Mr. Stuart Innes, British Consul General of Basrah, and Mr. Taha Al-Tamimi, Chief of the Political Section at the Consulate, who discussed British and coalition policy in southern Iraq and highlighted on-going political and economic development, as well reconstruction projects. The journalists also visited Al-Khora park, a UK Department for International Development (DFID)-funded project that has renovated the historic park for the community. They interviewed Mr. Abdul-Hafiz Al-Atti, a prominent local businessman who works closely with the British consulate on reconstruction and development projects in Basrah.

18. (U) On May 20, the journalists traveled down to an Iraqi Naval Base in Umm Qasr to participate in a joint UK/Iraqi naval training exercise and maritime security operations. The group accompanied the Iraqi Navy on a patrol of the Shat Al-Arab, the waterway in between Iraq and Iran, where the Iraqis demonstrated skills learned from the British Royal Navy. The group interviewed Lt. Wasam, the spokesman for the Iraqi Navy at Umm Qasr and met with Captain Adel, commander of the Iraqi Navy at Umm Qasr. They both indicated that their efforts are primarily focused on gasoline smuggling interdiction operations.

Future Programming - Menu of Opportunities in Basrah and Al Arabiya

19. (U) During the trip, PA Abu Dhabi worked to develop a network of contacts to facilitate further placement of Arab media into Basrah. They are also developing a "menu" of media opportunities that interested news organizations can use to custom design a program that focuses on their areas of interest. PA Abu Dhabi is planning to conduct a follow on media reporting trip for Al-Arabiya June 19-22. Additional trips for other UAE-based media organizations are planned further out in the summer.